

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00

DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 FAA-00 L-03 /032 W

----- 014781

R 021637Z FEB 76

FM AMCONSUL MILAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4542

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, IT

SUBJECT: TWA ACCIDENT AT MALPENSA

REF ROME 781

1. CONGEN HAS RECEIVED LETTER FROM A MR. VICO ROSASPINA ON THE SUBJECT OF THE TWA ACCIDENT AT MALPENSA AIRPORT DECEMBER 22. RASASPINA IS VERY FRIENDLY TO THE US AND A FORMER RESISTANCE LEADER WHO COOPERATED WITH US DURING WORLD WAR II.

2. ACCORDING TO A TEST PILOT AT MACCHI AIRCRAFT COMPANY, MR. ROSASPINA IS BETWEEN 55 AND 60 YEARS OF AGE, OF FRANCO-ITALIAN ORIGIN, A FREE LANCE JOURNALIST, AND A PROFESSIONAL PILOT. HE IS GREATLY INVOLVED IN GENERAL AVIATION AND IS AN EXPERT PILOT.

3. ACCORDING TO ALESSANDRO GHISLENI, TEST PILOT AT SIAI MARCHETTI AIRCRAFT COMPANY, MR. ROSASPINA IS A VERY WELL KNOWN PILOT, EXPERT IN GENERAL AVIATION MATTERS. GHISLENI DOUBTED THAT ROSASPINA IS EXPERIENCED IN COMMERCIAL AVIATION MATTERS OR THAT HE IS EXPERT IN ELECTRONIC LANDING SYSTEMS OTHER THAN AS A GENERAL AVIATION PILOT (GENERAL AVIATION USING THE SAME SYSTEMS AS COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS).

4. WHEN ASKED ABOUT HIS OWN KNOWLEDGE AND OPINION OF

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THE ILS AND GROUND APPROACH CONTROL RADAR AT MALPENSA

AIRPORT, GHISLENI REPLIED THAT HE USED THEM EVERY DAY AND THAT THEY WERE QUITE EFFECTIVE WITHIN THEIR OPERATING PARAMETERS WHICH ARE WELL KNOWN TO ALL USERS.

5. TRANSLATION OF LETTER FOLLOWS.

"NOTES AND CONSIDERATIONS ON TWA BOEING 707 ACCIDENT AT MALPENSA AIRPORT IN DECEMBER 1975.

MALPENSA ILS (INSTRUMENT LANDING SYSTEM)

SINCE ITS INSTALLATION, THE WAVE BEAM OF MALPENSA'S ILS HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS WHICH SOMETIMES CAUSE THE READING OF THE LANDING PATH ON THE INSTRUMENT TO BE IRREGULAR AND INACCURATE.

THIS DEFECT, WHICH TO MY KNOWLEDGE WAS DUE TO ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS FOREIGN TO THE INSTALLATION ITSELF, MANY YEARS AGO CAUSED A SIMILAR SERIOUS ACCIDENT WITH AN ALITALIA DC-6, DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, AS IN THE CASE OF THE TWA BOEING 707.

DUE TO THE BAD WEATHER CONDITIONS, IT SEEMS TO ME UNACCEPTABLE THAT IN THE FINAL APPROACH THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CO-PILOT HAD LANDED WITHOUT NOTICING THAT THE POINTERS OF THE ILS WERE NOT IN THE RIGHT POSITION (I.E. THAT THE PLANE WAS NOT LANDING ON THE RUNWAY), OR BETTER, IN THE POSITION THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN IF WORKING PROPERLY. NEITHER, IT OCCURS TO ME, WERE THERE GUSTS OF CROSSWIND WHICH COULD HAVE DRIVEN THE PLANE AWAY FROM THE RUNWAY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CAPTAIN'S CAREFULNESS AND HIS SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY WERE EVIDENCED IN HIS PREVIOUS ATTEMPT AT LANDING. IT IS THEREFORE TO BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE ILS INDICATION WAS WRONG, AS WAS DEMONSTRATED SOMETIMES IN THE PAST.

RADAR: GROUND CONTROL APPROACH

AT THE AIRPORT THERE IS (OR AT LEAST THERE WAS FOR SURE AS I USED IT MYSELF) A RADAR FOR GROUND CONTROL APPROACH. BY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE USE ONLY OF THIS SYSTEM AND WITHOUT A FURTHER ASSISTANCE BY ILS, MILITARY SUPERSONIC JETS LAND WITH ZERO VISIBILITY AND WITH MAXIMUM PRECISION IN ALL AIRPORTS IN THE WORLD, INCLUDING THE AIRPORT OF CAMERI, A FEW MILES FROM MALPENSA. THEREFORE, IN THE CASE OF THE TWA BOEING 707 UNDER DISCUSSION, THE RESULT OF A RELIABLE ILS AND AN EFFICIENT GCA WOULD HAVE OFFERED EVERY GUARANTEE. IT REMAINS THEREFORE TO ASCERTAIN BEFOREHAND - BESIDES THE RELIABILITY OF THE

ILS THAT DAY - WHETHER OR NOT THE GCA RADAR WAS FUNCTIONING.
IN FACT, IT OFTENS HAPPENS THAT BOTH THE MALPENSA AND THE
LINATE (AIRPORT) RADARS ARE OUT OF ORDER, OR ANYWAY, NOT
IN USE. IF IT WAS IN WORKING ORDER AND OPERATING, IT
SEEMS UNEXPLAINABLE HOW COME BOTH THE GCA OPERATOR
(RADAR BAND TRACK COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE ILS ONE)
AND THE PILOT OF THE BOEING 707 (WITH ILS) COULD FOLLOW
ALL THE LANDING PHASES WIHTOUT REALIZING THAT THE PLANE
WAS OFF OF THE AXIS.

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FM AMCONSUL MILAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4543
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CONCLUSIONS

IN MY OPINION, ALMOST ALL SERIOUS ACCIDENTS OF COMMERCIAL
AVIATION (AND ALSO PART OF GENERAL AVIATION) HAVE BEEN
CAUSED BY TWO CONNECTING FACTORS:

- 1) THE CLEAR, OBVIOUS, AND INDISPUTABLE TECHNICAL
INEFFICIENCY OF THE EQUIPMENT FOR FLIGHT ASSISTANCE IN
ITALY (OBJECTIVELY, THE OPERATORS ARE ABOVE ANY
COMMENDATION); WHICH PLACES THE AIR SPACE AND AIR
NAVIGATION ABSOLUTELY UNDER THE STANDARDS OF SAFETY,
MODERNITY, AND RELIABILITY OF OTHER CIVILIZED COUNTRIES;
- 2) THE PROBLEM WHICH RESULTS FOR THE PILOTS IN BALANCE
BETWEEN TAKING VERY PRUDENTIAL DECISIONS - WHICH WOULD
NOT BE ACCEPTED IN WELL EQUIPPED AIRPORTS - GIVING RISE
TO DISCREDIT AND CRITICISM; OR TO FACE SOME RISK, WHICH

IN THOSE CONDITIONS OF LACK OF ASSISTANCE AND ONLY WITH
THESE LACKS, TOUCH ON THE LIMITS OF IMPRUDENCE.

TO MY KNOWLEDGE, THE EXISTENCE OF AN EFFICIENT RADAR
NET (WHICH ITALY EXPORTS, BUT DOES NOT INSTALL IN
ADEQUATE QUANTITY IN ITS OWN TERRITORY) WOULD HAVE
CERTAINLY AVOIDED SEVERAL RECENT CRASHES: PALERMO PUNTA
RAISI (AN ALITALIA DC-8 CRASHED INTO A MOUNTAIN TOWARDS
WHICH IT FLEW FOR A LAPSE OF TIME LONG ENOUGH FOR A
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RADAR OPERATOR TO DETECT IT), BARI (ATI F-27 WHICH
LANDED WITH A CRASH AT NIGHT-TIME AWAY FROM THE AIRFIELD,
WHILE THE PILOT WAS CONVINCED OF BEING REGULARLY
ORIENTED TOWARDS THE RUNWAY), TURIN (AN ITAVIA F-28
CRASHED IN CONDITIONS SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE TWA B-707,
BUT WITH FATAL CONSEQUENCES), NAPLES (VISCOUNT CRASHED
INTO A MOUNTAIN ON APPROACH), AND MANY OTHERS MORE OR
LESS RECENT WHICH A GOOD RADAR COULD HAVE AVOIDED.
AS LONG AS THE ITALIAN RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES DO NOT
ADOPT ANY MEASURES TO RADICALLY AND DRASTICALLY FILL
THESE GAPS, I THINK THAT THE AIR COMPANIES (WHOSE PILOTS
ARE ACCUSTOMED TO TRUST IN A BELIEVABLE ASSISTANCE)
SHOULD DISCHARGE THEIR CAPTAINS FROM ANY CRITICISM AND
COMPLAINTS BEFOREHAND, WHENEVER THEY REFUSE TO LAND IN
AN AIRPORT THAT DOES NOT OFFER 100 PERCENT RADIOINSTRUMENTAL
ASSISTANCE WHICH, BOTH IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY, CAN
BE EXPECTED OF A CIVILIZED COUNTRY IN 1976. INSTEAD,
THEY SHOULD IMPOSE ON THEIR OWN CREWS SOME "MINIMUM"
HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS VERY
HIGH IN POORLY EQUIPPED AIRPORTS; EVEN 50 PERCENT OR 100
PERCENT HIGHER THAN THOSE SUGGESTED FOR MODERN AND WELL
EQUIPPED AIRPORTS. ON THE OTHER HAND, SUCH A MEASURE
COULD ALSO BE A STIMULUS FOR THE ITALIAN AUTHORITIES TO
ADJUST THEMSELVES. I DON'T THINK IT FAIR TO IMPOSE ON
PILOTS THE SAME "MINIMUM" VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS IN
AIRPORTS SUCH AS LONDON, FRANKFURT, NEW YORK, AND HUNDREDS
OF OTHER MODERNLY EQUIPPED IN AIRPORTS LIKE MALPENSA'S,
WHERE THE ILS IS NOT ALWAYS RELIABLE (WHICH CAUSED, A
FEW YEARS AGO, A SIMILAR ACCIDENT WITH AN ITALIAN DC-6)
AND WITH A RADAR THAT FUNCTIONS ONLY NOW AND THEN. IT
IS A PROBLEM WHICH SHOULD BE DISCUSSED AT THE ICAO LEVEL
OR FOR WHICH THE AIR COMPANIES COULD AT LEAST ADOPT
SOME IN-HOUSE MEASURES, IN ORDER TO RELIEVE THEIR
CAPTAINS FROM HAVING TO FACE, ALL OF A SUDDEN, IMMEDIATE,
DIFFICULT AND DELICATE DECISIONS. SIGNED: VICO ROSASPINA"

6. BECAUSE CONGEN NOT IN POSITION TO MAKE A TECHNICAL
JUDGEMENT OF VALUE OF LETTER, WE ARE TRANSMITTING TEXT
FOR USE AS DEPT. SEES FIT, BUT RECOMMENDING ACCEPTANCE

WITH A GRAIN OF SALT.FINA

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